

JUSTIFICATION  
THE MOST DIFFICULT THING GOD EVER DID

as taught by Willis E. Bishop  
at Good Samaritan Village

**Luke 5:17-26:** "And it came to pass on a certain day as Jesus was teaching that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by who were come out of every town of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was present to heal them. And behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they sought to bring him in and to lay him before the Lord. But when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the crowd, they went upon the housetop and let him down through the tiling on his couch into the midst before Jesus. And when Jesus saw their faith, He said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason saying, Who is this who speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone? But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answering said unto them, Why reason ye in your hearts? Which is easier to say -- Thy sins have been forgiven thee, or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath authority upon earth to forgive sins, He saith unto the paralytic, I say unto thee, Arise and take up thine couch and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them and took up that on which he lay and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear saying, We have seen strange things today."

Mark and Matthew also record this miracle. Mark says it took place in Capernaum. John points out that the authorities were already trying to seek some way to kill the Lord; for instance, after He had healed the man at the pool of Bethesda. That is one reason perhaps that we find in verse 17 that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were sitting by. Apparently they had come early because they had seats while many others had to stand. Notice, they were from every town of Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem -- they were flocking in and around the Lord to find something with which to fault Him and to take His life.

In verse 18, "Behold men brought in on a bed a man who was paralyzed." Mark adds that there were four men -- one on each corner of the little cot. When they couldn't get to Christ, we are told that, in verse 19, "they went up upon the housetop and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus." It's a little humorous, I think. Can you imagine these fellows, not being able to get into the house, and here's an outside stairway, which was on all the homes at that time, so they go up that outside stairway onto the roof. Then, as Mark says in the Greek, they "unroofed the roof" -- they dug through. It wasn't just a little thatch that was put up there -- there was tile on the roof, and they broke through the tile to make an opening to let that fellow down. You have to give them credit for believing that Christ could do something for that fellow, and I wonder what effect it had on the crowd in the house, what effect it may have had on the Lord -- I think you and I would have said, "Wow! What's going on here?" So just picture the

unrealness of that situation. These fellows were so sure Jesus could do something for him. And the man on the couch apparently was just as sure because he went along with it, and he is let down into the midst of the people before the Lord.

In verse 20, "When Jesus saw their faith" (I understand that to mean the faith of all five of them) "He said unto the man, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." That tells me that that man had some faith, because the Lord will not forgive a man's sins unless he wants them forgiven. So the man was there in faith, and the Lord forgave him.

That bothered the Pharisees and the scribes -- and for once they said something that was true, verse 21, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" That was true. Actually, a part of the outcome of this miracle is a proof that Christ is God, because He forgave the sins of that man. He read their thoughts and said, in verse 23, "Which is easier to say, Thy sins have been forgiven thee, or to say, Rise up and walk? But that you may know that the Son of Man hath authority upon earth to forgive sins, He said unto the paralytic, I say unto thee, Arise, take up thy couch, and go into thine house."

Which is easier? I'm sure that what the Lord was referring to here was a test that would be evident to the people. You and I could have said to that paralyzed man, "Your sins are forgiven," and you couldn't tell whether his sins were forgiven or not. That was true in the case of Christ -- He said, "Your sins are forgiven." On the surface we would probably say that it is easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven" than to say, "Rise up and walk." So we might say that Christ did the more difficult thing by saying to the paralytic, "Rise up and walk," and that proved that his sins had been forgiven. We might also say that nothing is too hard for God. But I want to take a different look at this set of verses, and to ask the question again, "Which is easier? The verifiable truth that he could get up and walk, or the truth that his sins were forgiven?" And I want to give you my own lefthanded opinion as to the most difficult thing God ever did.

There are at least fifteen subjects to be considered in connection with the forgiveness of sin and salvation from sin. Each would make an important and interesting study. In mentioning them I ask, "Could you in a sentence define each of these doctrinal truths?" Each of them is vital: grace, predestination, election, foreknowledge, calling, repentance (two different kinds), conversion (two different kinds), faith, union with Christ, justification, regeneration, adoption, sanctification (three different kinds), security, and glorification.

I will discuss just one: justification -- which I think is the most difficult thing that God ever did.

What is the biblical meaning of the term "to justify"? The term "justify" does not mean to make righteous. Turn to Proverbs 17:15: "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, both are an abomination to the Lord." You can't justify the wicked and be right. You can't condemn the just and be right. Yet God had the problem of justifying you and me as sinners before Him. That was

difficult to do. He could "speak and the worlds were created" -- He could "command and they stood fast." But it took more than that to justify you and me from our sins.

To justify is not to declare one innocent. Sometimes justification has been defined as "just as if I had never sinned." While I understand what they are trying to get at, that is not correct. We are justified, but we have been sinners, we still sin, and "our righteousness is as filthy rags." When I was a teenager some friends and I thought we were Tarzan and some of his apes, or something like that, and in the barn we had on our back lot in Greentown there were large beams. I took some ropes and hung them from the beams and put on some broomstick handles to make trapeze so we could swing from one to the other. We had a great time until one time I landed in the manger instead of catching the bar. When I got up one of my arms was broken above the elbow. That ended our Tarzan escapades. So, I have a broken arm. I confess to you that by this time I have forgotten which arm that was. For a long time, however, just before it began to rain that arm would ache at the place where it was broken. Right now I cannot tell which of those arms was broken -- but an x-ray would reveal it. My arm is not just as if it had never been broken -- the scar is there. You and I who believe on Christ have been justified from our sins, but it isn't just as if we had never sinned. In fact, we have gained more in Christ than we lost in Adam, and our justification means a whole lot more than any self-righteousness would have meant if we had never sinned.

Then, to justify is not the same as to forgive or pardon. Someone steals from someone else and is found out, and the fellow from whom the thing has been stolen says, "I forgive you." Well, that may be true, but it doesn't mean the one who stole is guiltless. I remember reading a short time ago of a Frenchman who was put into prison because of a crime he was supposed to have committed. Later it was found that he had not committed that crime and the person in charge sent him a pardon. That Frenchman refused the pardon. He said, "I do not want a pardon -- I am not guilty." The court recognized his claim and finally declared him not guilty. But you and I as sinners were guilty and yet God justified us. That's against the rule -- He justified the wicked. I think that's the most difficult thing God ever did.

How did God do that? How did He solve that great problem? I think you know the solution. God Himself became human flesh, lived without sin, and then, when it was time for Him to be received up, instead of being received up He went to Calvary's cross, and as a sinless human/divine being He paid for our sins. It was the only way it could be done. He was not a sinner -- it is important that you see that He was sinless and that He was divine, and therefore His payment was infinite in character, and He paid for our sins.

Let me illustrate, though this again is a very poor illustration. I was a very good young fellow and very seldom got into trouble, you understand? But on one occasion a pool room in the little town in which I lived was closed because the fellow who owned it couldn't make

ends meet. The sheriff came and put some locks on the doors so that whatever was in there by way of pool tables, candy, and gum, and so on (it was not a rowdy place) could be sold to pay the owner's debts. Before the locks were put on, someone broke through the back door of that pool room and took much of what was in there of candy and gum, but left the pool tables of course.

One night a gang of us who were on the team were getting ready to go to a ball game and someone told us that the pool room had been broken into. One of the fellows said, "Is that right? Let's go and have a look." So, under the cover of darkness we went up a back alley and stepped across the threshold where the door was hanging on one of its hinges and the lock had been broken. We looked in, came back out, and went to the ball game. Later someone reported to the sheriff that the place had been broken into, and then someone else reported the names of everybody who had been in there. And I had been in there.

The law said, "You have stepped across the threshold that had been locked by the sheriff. You are therefore guilty of that crime." The justice of the peace held a meeting (I was not there), but in a very fair way, I guess, he took the value of the stuff that had been stolen and divided it among the number of people who had been in that place, and my share was about \$5.00. That was in the late 1929s, near 1930, and a 50-cent piece looked like a million dollars to me. I didn't have anything at all like \$5.00. But in the eyes of the law I was guilty.

I waited until my dad came home -- he sat in the rocking chair on the side porch and began to rock. I went to him and said, "Dad, I owe a bill I cannot pay," and I explained the situation to him. I shall never forget as he rose from his chair without saying a word, and he never did speak to me about it. I watched him as he went down around the corner and I knew where he was going -- to the house of the justice of the peace. The son of the justice of the peace was a friend of mine in the same class, and he told me that when my dad walked in he did not say, "I understand my son is a criminal" -- he simply reached into his pocket, pulled out a five dollar bill (and that meant a great deal to my dad in those days) and said, "I understand that I owe a bill here," and he laid the money down and walked out. My dad paid a debt that I could not pay, and I was free from the law.

That's just exactly what Christ did on the cross. You and I could not pay for our sins, and those who do not accept the payment will pay everlastingly for them. Christ as the infinite Son of God in perfect human flesh in a sense went to the Father and said, "Father, I owe a bill here," and He laid down His life in order that you and I by believing on Him might be justified, declared righteous, from all our sins. That's the most difficult thing God ever did. I repeat, He could "speak and the worlds were created," He could "command and they stood fast," "the morning stars sang together," but when it came to justifying the wicked, it took an incarnation, it took a sinless life, it took a death on a cross, it took an Easter morning, to justify us from our sins.

And so, Christ, in the case of this paralytic, asked the Pharisees and the scribes, "Which is easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven, or Rise up and walk?" I'm sure He meant, "For you, which is more evidently true?" That's why He said to the man, "Rise up and walk." That was more difficult in the eyes of the Pharisees and scribes, but I say to you that the more difficult as far as the Lord was concerned was to say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee."

**Prayer:** Our Heavenly Father, this morning we realize perhaps in just a little different way what You've done for us by declaring us free from our sins, for granting everlasting life and righteousness by Your grace. With the crowd in that day, our hearts come before Thee in awe, in wonder, and admiration for the marvelous things which our Lord has done. We pray that today we may live as we ought, be what we ought, and say what we ought. Whatever our situation or condition, we pray that we may not forget the grace of God in our lives -- in the Saviour's precious, holy name. Amen.

(A word about Pharisees and scribes is attached.)

A WORD ABOUT PHARISEES AND SCRIBES  
by Willis E. Bishop

The Pharisees seemed to have come into existence after the return from Babylonian captivity in the 500s B.C. The word "Pharisee" comes from the word which means to separate. They were a group of people who apparently started out with a pretty good intention of fulfilling the law and of guarding against any outside influence that would take away from God's Word.

By the time of Christ they had become so involved in other details beyond what the law taught that it became impossible for people to live up to their standards, and they had gone way beyond what the Scripture intended. For example, they believed not only in the written law but in the oral law as well.

It was my privilege to study in several synagogues in the Washington, D.C. area. One of those was Ohav Shalom Talmud Torah on 16th Street, just before the border to Silver Spring, Maryland. It was of the Orthodox persuasion, and I was surprised that they allowed me to study there. I found in one class a man who I later felt was a real friend -- a severely Orthodox teacher. I learned much from him. He was open to questions and I tried to be reasonable in what I asked. I was not there to press Christianity but simply to live it and to learn.

I asked him one time about the oral law. He said, "We have a written law in the Pentateuch, and on Mount Sinai the Lord also spoke the oral law." However, when we read it we find that there are so many details which are contrary and which are impossible for any person to live, and it just is not reasonable at all. It was this kind of person, a Pharisee believing in those traditions, that was sitting before the Lord and trying to catch Him in anything that He said. So, the Lord on many occasions showed up their inconsistencies, and it became a real source of irritation to them.

In addition to the Pharisees in Luke 5:17, there are the teachers of the law. In verse 21 they are called scribes. Those men were instructed in the law and their primary job was to copy the written Scripture (Ezra was a scribe). By copying the written Scripture they of course became familiar with every jot and tittle of it. In fact, they were so careful in copying it that they knew how many letters were on a line, how many lines were on a page, what the middle letter of a particular book was, and we owe them a great deal that the Scripture was transcribed very accurately.

Because they knew so much about the Scripture, they became interpreters of the law as well. But they added to the actual requirements of the law so that our Lord Himself said, "You have laid upon the people burdens too difficult to bear." It was not the Scriptures -- it was their own interpretations. They came from every town in Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem in an attempt to catch Jesus in what He was going. You remember on one occasion they rebuked Jesus because His disciples ate with unwashed hands. They were so committed to their own interpretations that it was impossible for people to live up to the law. In Luke 5:17 they were surrounding Christ as He performed the miracle of healing the man stricken with palsy.